

ONE of the Army's major problems is the increasing wastage of Regular NCO's. Why do they leave the Service?

The two reasons most often given are lack of stability and shortage of married quarters. Only married men are affected by both factors, but a large number of NCO's are married.

In the belief that an NCO's decision to leave the Army is largely influenced by his wife's desire for a united and contented married life, Rhine Army decided to ask wives for their ideas on how to induce NCO's to stay in the Army. For the best letter £5 was offered.

More than 100 entries reached Headquarters, Northern Army Group for final judging, and it was at once evident that the wives relished this chance to air their views. Many expressed appreciation that their point of view was at last being considered. Entries were so good that a £2 second prize and three £1 consolation prizes were awarded.

The winning letter — a joint effort by the Royal Engineers Wives' Club in Dusseldorf — calls for an entirely new approach to Army families, saying: "The Army wife who has followed her husband hither and yon, faced uncomfortable journeys to strange countries — and often unspecified dangers — and borne her children far from home under trying conditions, is as much dedicated to the service of the Queen as her husband, and should occupy a place of honour in our national life which her civilian sister might not envy but would respect and admire."

The eight major points raised are: stability, housing, children's education, welfare, cost of living, pay, promotion, and security on completion of service.

"Security is a basic feminine need," says the winning letter. "It is the threat to this natural instinct that makes Army life unattractive to wives."

Wives point out that a husband may be posted at short notice somewhere his wife cannot go. She faces eviction from her quarters, and possibly life in a hostel. Her children's schooling is interrupted. If she can follow her husband, there is the problem of her own furniture, carpets and all that goes to make a house a home. To store it is very expensive. To sell it usually means a financial loss, with the prospect

Here are four members of the prize-winning Royal Engineers Wives' Club at Dusseldorf. Mrs. Greenwood (second from left) says: "My first boy was born in a wood cabin some 8000 feet up in the Himalayas."



THE KIND OF ARMY THAT WIVES WANT

- Why doesn't the Army store our furniture?
- Why not start an Army Building Society?
- Why not have warrant officers class three?

of having to buy more and repeat the whole process in a few years time. Here the suggestion is made that the Army should provide storage for families' belongings in Britain.

It is pointed out that the wife, often with a young family, is left to cope by herself with packing, handing over quarters and complicated documentation. No wonder that some wives — like the second prize-winner, Mrs. Govett, wife of SSM Govett of Headquarters, Army Troops Column RASC — sigh for the days before 1929 when postings between home and overseas were on a married-for-married, single-for-single system. This enabled the wife to travel with the husband; a return to this system, it is suggested, along with a guaranteed three-year tour, would do much to solve

education and other problems. (Between February 1951 and May 1952 Mrs. Govett's two young children attended four different schools.)

Rhine Army wives feel strongly about all this. "Build more quarters" is the general cry. A few suggest a return to the pre-war Married Quarters Roll, which ensured that, if a husband was posted to a families station anywhere in the world, he would occupy quarters. The drawback to this scheme is that the numbers eligible for the Roll were limited. Its adoption today would remove from the strength many families who are now occupying quarters.

Another suggestion is that every command in Britain should hold a small fleet of caravans. These could be sent to any part of the country for use by families waiting for quarters or passing through Britain on their way overseas. The setting up of a caravan colony after the Lynmouth disaster is quoted as an example of the efficient working of such a scheme.

There is resentment among wives at the local authorities' rule that a soldier's name cannot be held on the waiting list for a house in his own neighbourhood.

From a consolation prize-winner, Mrs. Lassen, whose husband serves with 22 Field Ambulance, RAMC, comes this idea: "I suggest an Army Building Society, run on exactly the same lines as the many existing ones in England, a fixed sum being paid monthly by the soldier, who is in return given his 2½-3% interest for the loan of the money, to accumulate throughout his years of service. He then knows that the more service he puts in,

the more money he will have paid towards his house, and the building society will immediately pay out the required sum for his house and the NCO can continue his payments after retirement."

Among other points are these: There should be secondary boarding schools in Britain for Service children.

There should be a rank of warrant officer class three, to increase chances of promotion.

Promotion would be more fair if emphasis was laid on general ability and trade qualifications.

It is hard to build up confidence in garrison medical officers owing to their youth and the frequency of their postings.

There should be a superannuation scheme to supplement pensions.

There should be one free (or subsidised) family passage to Britain during a Rhine Army tour.

There should be a local overseas allowance in Rhine Army.

On pay generally, most wives seem satisfied, though several of them suggest increases in allowances to meet various unavoidable commitments.

NAAFI's monopoly is disliked by some. They say its prices are too high and its stocks are limited.

Finally, security on leaving the Army. The winning letter calls for a guarantee that a man shall be found employment fitted to the position he held in the Army, otherwise he will leave at an age when he can more easily find such employment himself. Others want a better scheme for the employment of ex-soldiers in Government departments or civilian firms.

Some of the proposals are not practicable today or would cost too much — for instance, tax-free pensions. Other ideas, perhaps, could be made to work. No doubt they will be noted in high quarters.

What do wives in other commands think?

— Report by Major F. E. Dodman, Rhine Army Public Relations.



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